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## Introduction

**Cher Philippe**

It seems impossible that Philippe *le jeune* has turned eighty. Yet the calendar insists that it is so. We wonder if the great theorist of diaries has ever had an entry in his own diary: mon anniversaire.

This *Festschrift* honours the work Philippe Lejeune has done over a long and highly productive career as a scholar and promoter of life writing in all its forms, and the impact of this work on fellow scholars in the International Auto/biography Association—both its European chapter and more widely. It also celebrates Philippe the man—a colleague whose energy, inventiveness and warmth are repeatedly highlighted in the essays which follow.<sup>1</sup>

Through brief passages in various of his books and essays, it is possible to trace some of the contours of Lejeune's cultural and intellectual formation. He was born in 1938. His great-grandfather, Xavier-Édouard, was a shop assistant in the department stores of later nineteenth-century France, whose voluminous unpublished autobiographical writings Philippe described as "the symbolic realization of a social promotion mediocally achieved by the interested party, but well fulfilled in the next generation by his sons." (*On Autobiography*, 165) His sons were successful in the commercial career in which he had failed; and this provided the basis on which their children could embark on intellectual or artistic careers. (*Moi aussi*, 194) This next generation included, besides a caricaturist-illustrator and a children's author, Philippe's father, Michel, a specialist in Greek linguistics who became professor at the Sorbonne.

Is it too fanciful to suggest a shared pattern between father and son, in the trajectory of their intellectual interests over their careers? Just as Michel, whose early career was rooted in the core texts of Classical Greek, later moved outwards from the Latin of Rome to the marginalised and neglected languages which fell victim to Roman expansionism (Oscan, Venetian ...) and to the regional varieties of continental Celtic, so Philippe

turned his own focus outwards from the male giants of the autobiographical canon to such unregarded and anonymous writings as the diaries of nineteenth-century girls?<sup>2</sup>

After studying at the École Normale Supérieure, Lejeune taught first at the University of Lyon (1966–1972), and then at the University of Paris 13 (Paris-Nord, Villetaneuse; 1972–2004). Aspects of Lejeune's professional career and intellectual trajectory are explored below in the chapters by Eakin, Hornung, Howes, Popkin, Hämmerle, Alamand, Varga and Ashplant.<sup>3</sup>

The *Festschrift* opens with Julia Watson responding to Lejeune's "ironically ambivalent edge—an edge I treasure". In a series of aphoristic paragraphs, addressing key aspects of his engagement with life writings, she emphasises the importance of his language and style; highlighting the "poetry in [his] criticism", she suggests that "the ironic cast of his terms alludes to the paradox at the heart of self-referential writing". Yet, she insists, he should not be seen simply as a theorist; "extensive archival study buttresses most of his work". Above all, with reference to her own re-readings of Lejeune's writings, she acknowledges their fertility: "As a critic of life writing I have come to feel that, whatever I take up for study, M. Lejeune has already considered it—and long ago."

The first group of essays charts, through personal connections and shared memories, the Lejeunean contribution of ideas and institutions regarding life writings. John Eakin locates the genesis of the volume he edited which introduced Lejeune's work to the Anglophone world, *On Autobiography* (1989), in a broader narrative of the developing friendship between these two theorists of life writing. Pinpointing their shared interest in "a key question concerning life writing as a practice: why do people do it, and why do others care about what they do", he traces the connection between Philippe's editing, with his father, of the autobiographical manuscripts of their ancestor, Xavier-Edouard, and Philippe's "almost evangelical pursuit of ordinary lives".

Alfred Hornung celebrates the international impact of Lejeune as colleague and global inspiration. He is "le pape de l'autobiographie", his influence reaching out, not from Rome (or even Avignon) but the small town of Ambérieu-en-Bugey, near Lyon, home of *L'Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique* (APA, founded in 1992). The chapter traces Lejeune's impact on the founding of both the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) (1999) and its European chapter (2009). Hornung suggests his addresses to each group, like his work as a whole, exemplify "le pacte Philippe", which can be summed up in a sentence of Rousseau: "Je sens mon coeur, et je connais les hommes".

Craig Howes shares the same starting point: he takes the reader behind the scenes at the founding conference of IABA to reveal Lejeune's role in shaping the form that association would take. He then traces Lejeune's continuing connections with the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, and its journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*. Two further developments arose from this informal collaboration. First, the publication of *On Diary* (2009), a collection of Lejeune's key writings in the new field of life writing which he had opened up, and which forms the essential companion for Anglophone readers to *On Autobiography* (1989). And second, the sustained efforts, at IABA conferences and in the pages of *Biography*, to address and reflect linguistic and regional diversity.

Jeremy Popkin locates Lejeune's career in a specifically French context, suggesting that "in spite of his doubts about the movement at the time, he is one of those whose work has best embodied the spirit of May 1968". This is evident in Philippe's "willingness to go anywhere and talk to anyone about his subject [which] is exceptional". The founding of *APA*, the creation of its reading groups, the development of imaginative ways of reacting to life writings, the efforts to secure better archival provision—all these are products of a conviction that "writing about the self is a practice that is not and should not be reserved only for authors with literary aspirations", and an aim "to break down the hierarchy that permits ordinary people to write about their lives but reserves the interpretation of the genre to academic specialists".

Christa Hämmerle develops this theme with particular reference to gender. She insists that it was not only Lejeune's openness and curiosity but also his courage which led him to research the writings of ordinary people. In his study of the diaries of young girls in nineteenth-century France, *Le Moi des Demoiselles* (1993), he took seriously "a type of personal writing which both contemporaries and literary educated elites (including literary scholars) had long since defined as being of no value, nonsense, boring, and even dangerous to the desired female self". Lejeune's theoretical exploration of the practice of diary writing, underpinned by extensive archival work, paralleled the feminist scholarship which led, in Austria, to the creation of the *Sammlung Frauennachlässe*.

Several contributions engage with the major theoretical contributions Lejeune has made to the understanding of life writings. The text, and concept, most identified with him is "The Autobiographical Pact". In tracing the trajectory (much of it not available in English) of Lejeune's continuing refinement of his concept—at least as much in response to his own self-questioning as in dialogue with his critics—Carole Allamand shows how the role of the reader becomes central to understanding the interplay between author, text and reader.

Zoltan Varga's essay foregrounds two different aspects of Lejeune's career. On the one hand, theoretical rigour and innovativeness characterised his early writing on autobiography as it grew out of the structuralism dominant in French academic life, and as he repositioned autobiography as "a contractual genre, an implicit agreement between authors and readers guaranteed by diverse institutions". On the other hand, Varga pays tribute to Lejeune's very personal support for new scholarship in post-Communist Hungary through a book of his translated essays. That rigour and generosity combine in the humane scholarship for which Lejeune is so rightly and widely celebrated.

Timothy Ashplant highlights the democratic spirit evident in Lejeune's career, both in the expansion of his interests from hypercanonical autobiographies such as those of Sartre and Leiris to an ever widening range of quotidian life writings; and in the creativity which led to the formation of *APA*, whose members read and respond to contemporary unpublished life writings. Here, theory is embodied in practice: the centrality of the reader identified by Allamand in Lejeune's evolving pact is enacted in the *lecture en sympathie* which is at the heart of *APA*.

Thomas Couser is another author who singles out as fundamental the influential essay "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write". He shows its pertinence to interpreting such essential forms of American life writing as slave narratives and cross-cultural ethnographic collaborations. Couser also points to a crucial (and all too rare) feature of Lejeune's style: the ability "to read and write in a way that is theoretically sophisticated without recourse to excessive abstraction".

Julie Rak's essay responds to two themes in Lejeune's later illuminating thinking about diary keeping as practice. For both the young Philippe and the young Julie, the diary was a private space, both material (Julie's first diary had "its little lock and key that so delighted me") and psychic, which can become "a sanctuary, a place where I could speak with myself, where no one could tell me what to say or how to say it". And for both, it was also an archive in time, sometimes disconcertingly. The young diarist inscribes "traces for a future adult whom I am helping by recording his history, someone who will later help me better understand the confusion I'm experiencing" (Lejeune); but these traces may record aspects of our past that "we ourselves may not have incorporated into our own story of our lives" (Rak).

Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker's chapter places Lejeune's work alongside the contribution of a Dutch scholar whose intellectual formation was within the discipline of history. Jan Presser, like Lejeune, focussed on autobiographical writing at a time when such texts were not seen as a serious research subject in history, any more than in literary

studies. Both scholars felt a need to map this little-explored field, in the course of which they introduced new definitions. The development of Presser's concept of "egodocument" shows that he, like his French counterpart, was ready to adapt his thinking to the complexities of the textual archive. Both were also concerned with the unclear border between fiction and life writing. Presser's sense of the value of egodocuments came especially from his extensive use of diaries, memoirs and letters in his history of the fate of the Dutch Jews during the German occupation, in which he wanted "to confront the reader continually with the experiences, thoughts and feelings of individual persons".

Another group of essays takes some aspect of Lejeune's work on life writing as an illuminating starting point for examining some of the functions such texts can play. In her gift to our honorand, Regine Strätling explores a key question posed by the voluminous life writings of Michel Leiris, one identified in an early essay of Lejeune: is it possible to use theories drawn from the human sciences to read an autobiography which is itself already informed and shaped by such theories? Strätling draws out the intellectual, thematic and personal links during the 1930s between Leiris and two contemporary theorists of the Gift, Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille, identifying the similarities and differences in their understandings of the mechanisms and meanings of gift giving. She goes on to suggest that Leiris's *La règle du jeu*, published in the late 1950s, already registers his break with the political impulse underlying the trio's celebrating of a different economy of giving, one which had shaped his own earlier understanding of key transactions in his life.

The next five essays address, in diverse contexts, the capacity of life writing to assist people in bearing and resisting the traumas of human life and political oppression. Leonieke Vermeer explores, through nineteenth-century Dutch diaries, changing patterns in parents' responses to the loss of children in early life. Diaries were increasingly used as a place for expressing emotions of loss, though within a framework of prescribed attitudes. These included a Stoical Christian attitude towards death, which could often be difficult to maintain in practice; and a differential pattern in the responses expected from husbands and wives. As well as being sensitive to the influence of these conventions, the moments when they come under strain or are broken, and the possibility that they conceal rather than describe the parents' actual emotions, Vermeer also urges the need to be aware of the possible meanings of silences and gaps.

Gergely Kunt introduces a Hungarian teenager whose family was banished by the Communist regime in the early 1950s as class enemies. In her diary (one of the few contemporary sources about the deportations), Gizella Somlay displays the role of humour and word-play in helping her

resist the threat of humiliation which exile poses. The devices of irony, self-irony and twisting the meanings of state propaganda slogans serve to distance herself to some degree from a harsh daily reality.

Focussing on the diaries of some leading twentieth-century Polish writers, Pawel Rodak explores ways in which the space of the diary and the act of diary writing can help to contain and render manageable experiences of loss, meaninglessness and despair. Lejeune's view that the diary enables self-fortification is mapped onto a range of different examples of diaries used to confide and manage misery, and a typology of the diary's autotherapeutic functions.

Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle gives a new inflection to one of Lejeune's most quoted sentences: "In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing." Many who have lived under dictatorial governments in the Americas in the past two centuries have had to acknowledge "not just the narratological limits of autobiography, but the practical circumstances of authoritarian regimes that make it impossible to come to autobiographical voice". Against this pressure, they have asserted "the impossibility of not writing", employing a range of strategies which exploit the uncertain identification of author and model implicit in the autobiographical pact, and which acknowledge the pressures on autobiographical genres under totalitarian regimes. The particular pressures on women writers as less secure subjects under patriarchy reveal gendered strategies for expressing and sometimes evading those pressures.

Two separate aspects of Lejeune's thinking are brought creatively together in Gillian Whitlock's examination of its relevance to postcolonial contexts. His emphasis in (once again) "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write" on questions of communicative ethics is linked to his suggestion in *Cher Écran* (2000) that digital texts require new styles of reading and critical practice. Whitlock uses these insights to explore the strategies of Behrouz Boochani—a journalist, an Iranian of Kurdish ethnicity, now an asylum seeker—held in mandatory detention by the Australian authorities in a camp in Papua New Guinea. He responds with an online "Diary of a Disaster", "a chronicle of the occupation, a performative space where the diary narrative enables a visceral and intimate account of ... resistance". Whitlock links this practice to Lejeune's figuring of the diary (during his own detention in a sanatorium) as "an asylum in space", a place of "auto-hospitality".

Weaving together Lejeune's long-standing interest in the textual genetics of life writings with an intertextual reading across the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction, Monica Soeting explores how the Dutch children's author Cissy van Marxveldt used the diary form in her life

and her fiction. Van Marxveldt's best-known series was read and enjoyed by Anne Frank, and stimulated her determination to become a writer. Acknowledging Lejeune's (typical) generosity in his appreciation of Otto Frank's choices and actions as the editor of his daughter's journal, *Soeting* thus enriches Lejeune's insistence that Anne Frank's *Diary* was transformed from a "vague project" of an adolescent girl to the "structured, continuous text" of a writer in the making. *Soeting* also shows how fandom around van Marxveldt's stories structured literary forms of acting out by her young admirers, which invites fresh ways of reading Frank's *Diary*.

The *Festschrift* ends, appropriately, on a playful note. Charmed by Philippe's "impeccable way of saying Bonjour", Clare Brant's response is to use the story referenced in his essay "Lucullus Dines with Lucullus" to follow an associative chain of gustatory and gastronomic terms, through which she conjures up—by echoing in her own writing—the openness and playfulness which characterise Lejeune's own *plaisir du texte*—a *plaisir de lecture*.

Lucullus dined alone; and the restaurant named after him (Brant reports with regret) has closed. But here a full table of authors has gathered in response to Philippe's openness and generosity as a scholar, colleague and friend. Some contributors have known him a long time, and as a friend; others know the man from his books. In a nice irony for this critic who is attentive to the significance of names, the *Festschrift* inscribes him by formal and informal names, in a mixed and hybrid way. If the venerability of age invites honouring by naming, and naming by titles, our informal appellations also signify a depth of affection made possible by his own approachability and warm humanity.

For all the many ways his readers and admirers approach him, it is a great pleasure for all of us to offer him this volume as a tribute and a celebration of his academic and human achievements. *Bonne anniversaire!*

The Editors

## NOTES

- 1 It was Gergely Kunt's inspired idea for IABA Europe to prepare a *Festschrift* for Philippe Lejeune. It has been edited by Timothy Ashplant, Clare Brant and Ioana Luca, and coordinated by Petra van Langen.
- 2 For the career of Michel Lejeune, see *École pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences historiques et philologiques. Livret-Annuaire* 15: 1999–2000 (Paris, 2001), p. 34. [https://www.persee.fr/doc/ephe\\_0000-0001\\_1999\\_num\\_15\\_1\\_10757](https://www.persee.fr/doc/ephe_0000-0001_1999_num_15_1_10757).



- 3 Lejeune's own account of his intellectual journey is in his "Itinéraires d'une recherche", in *Écrire sa vie. Du pacte au patrimoine autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Mauconduit, 2015), 13–35. The original English text is "From Autobiography to Life-Writing, from Academia to Association: A Scholar's Story", [www.autopacte.org/From%20Academy%20to%20Association.html](http://www.autopacte.org/From%20Academy%20to%20Association.html). A full bibliography of his publications is at [http://www.autopacte.org/Bibliographie\\_personnelle.html](http://www.autopacte.org/Bibliographie_personnelle.html).